

# PS PUBLIC SERVICE REVIEW

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# Multidisciplinary research and collaborative processes

*A new perspective in social sciences...*

**T**he Research Centre for Spatial and Organizational Dynamics (CIEO), hosted by the University of the Algarve, is accredited and financed by the Portuguese Foundation for Science and Technology. It was founded in 2007 and has grown to 83 effective members, of which 54% have a PhD degree, and senior researchers are sociologists, psychologists, managers, economists, educational and information management scientists, geographers, environmental engineers and architects. The remaining members are PhD students linked by an active networking system promoting young talent and cross-discussions. There is a particular effort to work with other institutions on research centred on environmental resilience and land use management. Furthermore, the CIEO is connected to the regional entrepreneurial structure by the grounding of an extended platform composed of 20 local firms.

The major goal of the CIEO is to bring a new perspective into social sciences in multidisciplinary and collaborative research. The centre is a pioneer in Portugal, not only due to transversal research areas but also because it simultaneously emphasises knowledge creation, knowledge diffusion and knowledge application, therefore contributing to synergetic scientific approach and the finding of holistic solutions.

The CIEO is composed of two interactive research groups. The first deals with spatial interactions and socio-economic impacts of human mobility, social modernisation, technological innovation, climate change, territorial policies, landscape protection, management and planning. Aware of different organisations' behavioural

patterns and performances when locally embedded, the second group searches for the specific role of organisations in the previous interactions; namely, by encouraging studies related to educational sciences, process innovation, organisational management, entrepreneurship and strategy. Hence, studies about organisations emerge naturally in the CIEO, particularly when a close partnership between two different scientific areas tends to justify growth and sustainability as factors for any spatial adjustment.<sup>1</sup>

### Territorial identity

Based on this, the CIEO represents a link between the different components of organisational management and spatial dynamics, framed by a theoretical line that supports competence building and strategic decentralisation towards regional innovation. Thus, it is not surprising that learning and social awareness constitute, in this view, the basis for territorial identity, land use management and sustainable development.

This centre's localisation at the southern border of the Iberian Peninsula points to specific concerns that are in the current research agenda of the CIEO team, namely:

- An accentuated economic development, determined by a high tourist pressure, with a high environmental and urban impact – this is a region submitted to external conditions in which accelerated growth has generated positive and negative externalities. It is a laboratory for the permanent monitoring and evaluation of European and national policies related to sustainability and regional development;



*Professor Dr Teresa de Noronha Vaz, President*

- Together with this strong growth, there is a small dimension entrepreneurial structure oriented towards the main activity of tourism, with a low aptitude towards technological innovation – it is relevant, if not fundamental, to find a way to interact with such an entrepreneurial context, integrating it within the concerns of the present scientific research;
- The existence of other productive sectors able to integrate new companies in the same geographic space, catalysing innovation and pushing the regional dynamics into an enlarged networking system is a must at the enlarged Mediterranean level. A call is made for initiative and entrepreneurship. In this direction, the CIEO is promoting joint research with other centres in order to track and advance some of the most promising activities with a business potential in the south region of the Iberian Peninsula: sea and environmental sciences and products, as well as agronomic sciences, biotechnological and agro-food technologies; renewable

energies, due to the unique conditions, regarding the energetic resources available in southern Europe;

- Environmental impacts resulting from the pressure of the economic and human activities – the fragile and unique ecological system in the Mediterranean occidental coast depends on the existing economic activities and the way they are monitored. Risk evaluation at the natural and social catastrophe levels, which may arise from situations related to an unstable ecological equilibrium, are the only effective way to ensure the territorial sustainability. In this sense, the CIEO encourages future studies and research in the field.

‘...the CIEO represents a link between the different components of organisational management and spatial dynamics, framed by a theoretical line that supports competence building and strategic decentralisation towards regional innovation.’

There is a clear awareness of the need to stress territorial identity in the Mediterranean Basin and to better understand the role of organisations in this process. This is challenging researchers to choose new, more applied but transdisciplinary research areas such as socioeconomic impacts of environmental change, landscape protection, management and planning, town renovation, rural development, and information science applied to growth and business management, or social impacts of ageing and new diets.

## Internationalisation

Although located far from the major scientific circuits, the CIEO calls for international networking. Among its effective members, one can find Portuguese, Dutch, South African, Brazilian, Peruvian and Spanish researchers. Besides, the CIEO has a consulting board composed of British, Dutch, Spanish, Austrian and South African prominent scientists. The future will bring new international relations with India, Russia and Sweden and intensify those with Brazil. For this, there are partnership protocols in discussion that include the bases of new advanced courses financed by the ERASMUS MUNDUS programme of the EU.

In addition, the CIEO belongs to the following long-term networks: ARIMNET, UNISCAPE, the International Union of Forest Research Organization (IUFRO), the World Association of Soil & Water Conservation (WASWC), the Research Network Minesite Recultivation (ReNet), the World Scientific and Engineering Academy and Society (WSEAS), the Global Network for Environmental Science and Technology (GlobalNEST), the European Network for Research on Desertification (DesertNet), the European Human Resources Development Network, the European Employment Observatory Network and Mutual Learning Support Services, Observatory PASCAL – Place Management, Social Capital and Learning Regions, the European Society for Research on the Education of Adults (ESREA), Associação Europeia de Psicologia Organizacional e do Trabalho (EAWOP), the American Psychological Association (APA), the Society for the Advancement of Socioeconomics, the Society for the History of Technology (SHOT), EAEPE – European Association for Evolutionary Political Economy, Société Royale d’Economie Politique (Belgian Economic

Association), Association Belge de Sociologie de Langue Française, Groupe de Recherche sur les Economies Régionales du Bassin Méditerranéen (GRERBAM), Réseau Européen Droit et Société (RED&S) – Université Paris-X – Nanterre and Association Européenne Modélisation de la Complexité – AE-MCX, France. Also, at present, several financed EU research projects have established regular short-term partnerships. Examples are the links with many European universities. Such links are to be kept as long-term relationships as much as possible.

## Vision

The CIEO aims to become an international reference for Mediterranean studies related to innovation, sustainability, impact evaluation and risk management, thereby stressing the major role of organisations, in particular the small firms and the regional political context. The centre provides research support at international, national and regional levels in these areas.

<sup>1</sup> The modern growth literature pays much attention to innovation and knowledge as drivers of new developments in a competitive open economic system. The literature in this field addresses, in particular, micro- and macro-economic interactions at local or regional levels, based on clustering and networking principles, in which sustainability conditions also play a core role



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